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PAGE 01 STATE 223305

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C O N F I D E N T I A L - SCC

SUBJECT: KHMER REPATRIATES

REF: STATE 213500

MESSAGE NO. 1046

1. (C) THE MORALE OF THE 151 KHMER REPATRIATES IN PENDLETON REMAINS STABLE AND RELATIVELY HIGH. MOST STILL APPEAR DETERMINED TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA. THEIR REASONS USUALLY ARE PERSONAL AND REVOLVE AROUND SUCH THINGS AS WANTING TO REUNITE WITH FAMILIES, TO FIND KHMER GIRLS TO MARRY, OR TO RETURN TO PREVIOUS PROFESSION. OTHER REPATRIATES ARE MORE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND WANT TO GO BACK IN ORDER TO ASSIST IN THE REBUILDING OF A NEW SOCIALIST CAMBODIA. A FEW OF THE REPATRIATES HAVE RECENTLY INDICATED THAT THEY MAY BE RECONSIDERING THEIR DECISION TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA, AND ONE DID IN FACT APPLY FOR A SPONSOR IN THE UNITED STATES. THE CONTINUED HESITANCY OF THE PHNOM PENH GOVERNMENT TO MAKE A PUBLIC DECISION CONCERNING REPATRIATION MAY INDUCE OTHERS TO RETHINK THEIR POSITION, BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT MANY WILL ACTUALLY OPT TO STAY IN THE UNITED STATES.

2. (C) AS FOR THE MECHANICS OF THEIR RETURN TO CAMBODIA, THE KHMERS ARE AWARE THAT THE USG IS RELYING ON THE UNITED
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PAGE 02 STATE 223305

NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) TO WORK OUT

AN AGREEMENT WITH PHNOM PENH AND FOR THE MOST PART THEY ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH THIS APPROACH. MOST OF THE REPATRIATES UNDERSTAND THAT THE USG HAS NO DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH PHNOM PENH AND THEREFORE CANNOT DEAL DIRECTLY WITH THE NEW REGIME. OTHERS ALSO BELIEVE THAT BY RETURNING TO CAMBODIA UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNHCR THEY WILL ESCAPE THE FATE OF THE EIGHTY-SEVEN FANK OFFICERS WHO WERE EXECUTED AFTER THEY RETURNED FROM THAILAND (SECSTATE 213500). ALTHOUGH THE REPATRIATES ARE CONTENT TO HAVE THE UNHCR HANDLE THEIR CASE, THEY DO FEEL THE UNHCR IS NOT MOVING FAST ENOUGH AND SEVERAL CRITICIZED THE UNHCR FOR NOT DEALING DIRECTLY WITH THE KHMER DELEGATION WHICH RECENTLY ATTENDED THE UN CONFERENCE ON THE DEVELOPING NATIONS IN NEW YORK. FOR THEIR PART, THE KHMER REPATRIATES DID TALK DIRECTLY WITH THIS DELEGATION AND WERE ASSURED THAT PHNOM PENH WILL RECEIVE THEM IN DUE COURSE.

3. (C) IN GENERAL, THE KHMER REPATRIATES ARE AN UNSOPHISTICATED GROUP WHO HAVE UNRESERVEDLY PLEDGED THEIR FAITH IN THE GOODWILL
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OF THE NEW REGIME IN PHNOM PENH. THEY ARE CONSEQUENTLY NOT RECEPTIVE TO ANY DISCUSSION OF THE POSSIBLE DANGER INVOLVED IN THEIR RETURN TO CAMBODIA AND THEY USUALLY FORESTALL SUCH DISCUSSIONS BY REPEATING STICK ANSWERS WHICH THEY HAVE MEMORIZED. THEY ARE, HOWEVER, EAGER TO RECEIVE ALL OF THE INFORMATION THEY CAN ABOUT THE STATUS OF THEIR REPATRIATION AND THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES CONCERNING THE PHNOM PENH REGIME. THEY ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA, INCLUDING THE CONDITION OF THE KHMER REFUGEES IN THAILAND AND THEIR REASON FOR LEAVING CAMBODIA.

4. (C) IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE KHMER REPATRIATES' FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES AND PREVENT ANY POSSIBLE RECURRENCE OF THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WITH THE VIETNAMESE REPATRIATES, WE HAVE CONTINUED TO MEET DAILY WITH THE KHMER REPATRIATES AND TO DISCUSS IN AN INFORMAL AND UNSTRUCTURED MANNER ANY PROBLEMS OR QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT HAVE. THIS APPROACH HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL AND IN ORDER TO IMPROVE IT EVEN FURTHER WE NEED THE FOLLOWING ASSISTANCE FROM WASHINGTON. FIRST, WE NEED A CONTACT PERSON EITHER IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OR IN THE TASK FORCE WHO CAN KEEP US UP-TO-DATE ON ALL DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE KHMER REPATRIATION QUESTION.
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PAGE 03 STATE 223305

SECOND, WE WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE ALL INFORMATION AVAILABLE CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA AND THE CONDITION OF THE KHMER REFUGEES IN THAILAND. INCLUDED SHOULD BE BOTH OFFICIAL USG MATERIAL WHICH WASHINGTON FEELS WOULD BE PERTINENT AS WELL AS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRESS REPORTS. IF POSSIBLE, SUCH INFORMATION SHOULD BE SENT TO US ON A REGULAR BASIS. THIS

INFORMATION WOULD BE FOR DISSEMINATION TO THE REPATRIATES.
AND THIRD, WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REPLY OFFICIALLY TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE
KHMER REPATRIATES:

A. WHAT IS THE POLICY OF THE USG TOWARDS OPENING RELATIONS
WITH THE NEW REGIME IN PHNOM PENH?

B. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE UNHCR EFFORTS TO REPATRIATE
THOSE KHMER WHO WISH TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA?

C. WHAT IS THE RTG POSITION TOWARDS THE KHMER REPATRIATION
PROBLEM?

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